



Discontinuation of Kolkata's Tram Service

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Why in News?

Recently, the **West Bengal** government has decided to **discontinue** [Kolkata's tram service](#) after 151 years of its introduction.

- A small stretch from **Maidan to the Esplanade** will be retained for tram lovers as a [heritage stretch](#).

What are the Key Facts About Kolkata's Tram Service?

- **About Tram:** A tram is an **urban rail transit system** consisting of **railcars** that transports people and goes along **metal tracks in the road**.
 - In Kolkata, initially it ran on **metre gauge** but after **1902** tracks were converted to **standard gauge**.
- **Beginning of Trams in Kolkata:** The first **horse-drawn** trams in Kolkata began operating on **24th February 1873**, covering a **3.9-km** stretch between Sealdah and Armenian Ghat.
 - [Calcutta Tramways Company](#) was formed and registered in London in **1880**.
- **Electrification and Expansion:** On **27th March 1902**, Kolkata introduced its first **electric tramcar** from Esplanade to Kidderpore.
 - This was also **Asia's first** electric tram service.
 - In **1946**, the tram was the **first vehicle** to cross the [Howrah Bridge](#).
 - By the **early 20th century**, tram routes connected the city extensively, including the Howrah section via the **Howrah Bridge**.
- **Decline from the 1970s:** The rise of cars and buses on Kolkata's narrow streets made trams **cumbersome** and contributed to **traffic congestion**.
- **Cultural Symbolism:** It is depicted in [Satyajit Ray's](#) 1964 film 'Mahanagar' (The Big City) and other films like **Apur Sansar** reflecting **Kolkata's cultural backdrop**.
- **Recognition:** In 2020, Kolkata introduced India's **first electric tram library**.
 - In **2023**, Kolkata celebrated **150 years** of tram services with a week-long event called "**Tramjatra 2023**".
- **Trams in Other Indian Cities:** Trams started in **Bombay in 1874**, **Madras in 1895**, **Delhi in 1904**, **Kanpur in 1914**, and Poona in the early 20th century.
 - They were **discontinued** in all Indian cities between **1933 and 1964**, except for Kolkata.
- **Trams in Global Cities:** **Melbourne**, Lisbon, San Francisco, Amsterdam, Zurich and Berlin have well functioning tram service.
 - Melbourne has the **oldest** operational tramways in the world which started in **1885**.

Why Trams Lasted for So Long Only in Kolkata?

- **Narrow Streets:** The city's **narrow streets** and **old architectural structures** limited the expansion of road networks, making trams a practical alternative.
- **Low Car Ownership:** Low car ownership in **Kolkata compared to other metropolitan cities** **sustained** the demand for affordable public transport like trams.
- **Affordable Ticket Prices:** The affordability of tram rides also contributed to their longevity.

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